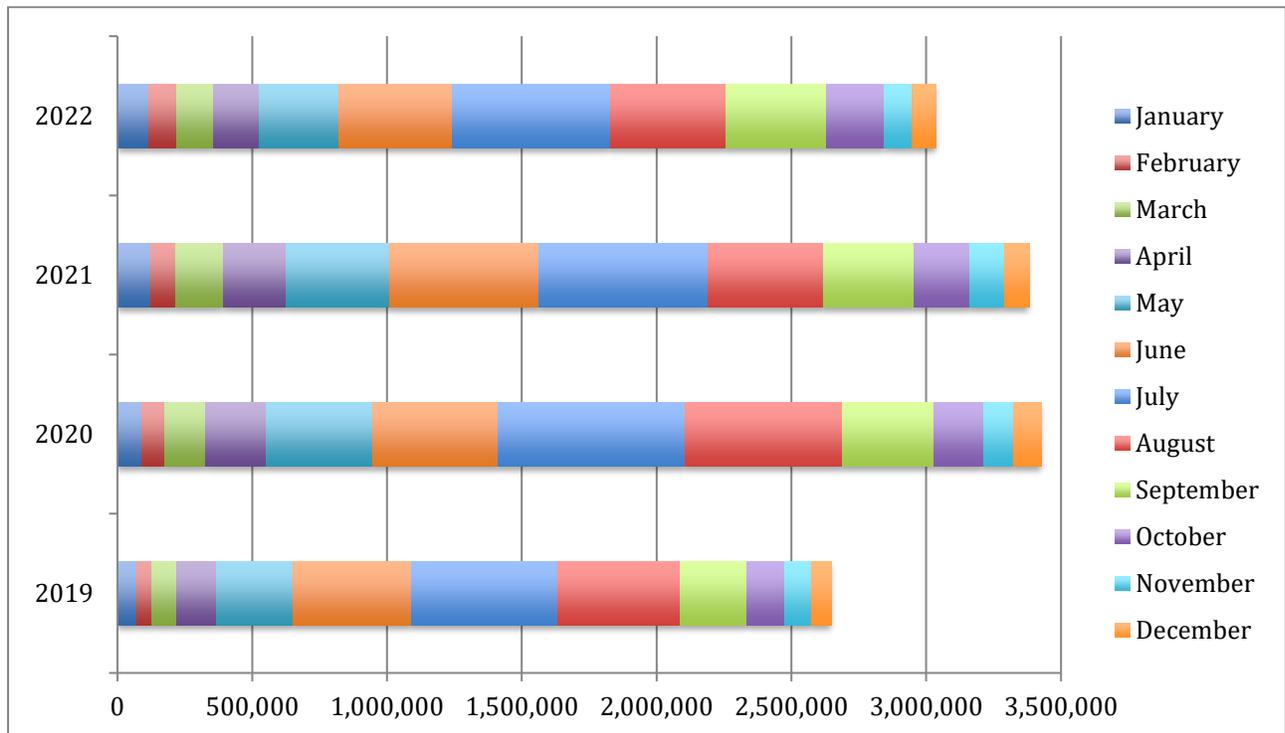




## 2022 Montana State Parks Annual Visitation Report

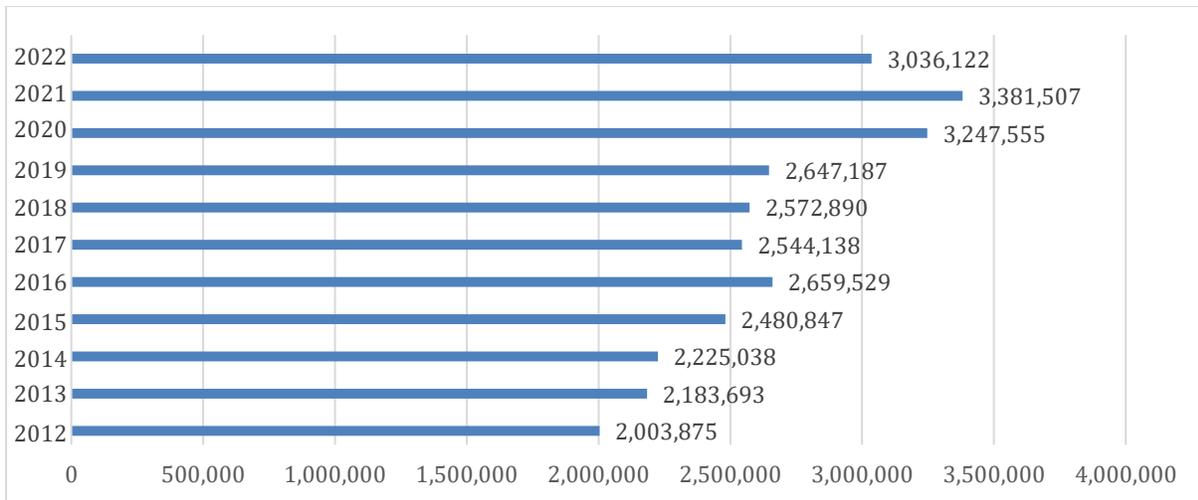
March 15, 2023

The Montana State Parks system welcomed an estimated **3.04 million** visitors in 2022. This number is a 10% decline from 2021 estimates; however, it is still 15% higher than pre-pandemic levels seen in 2019. This changing visitation is a trend being seen throughout parks and outdoor recreation as a market correction to the boom in visitation seen during 2020 and 2021.



Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
2019	72,608	53,884	94,648	146,589	284,340	437,261	545,156
2020	92,121	83,506	151,979	224,062	396,508	465,567	691,549
2021	124,361	91,749	175,726	235,605	383,052	553,824	626,315
2022	114,993	105,553	137,023	166,989	295,263	422,988	585,960
	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total Visitation	
2019	452,339	248,866	138,170	99,648	73,678	<b>2,647,187</b>	
2020	582,160	342,403	182,221	112,466	103,013	<b>3,427,555</b>	
2021	428,996	335,084	207,789	127,324	91,682	<b>3,381,507</b>	
2022	429,003	372,233	215,667	101,124	89,316	<b>3,036,121</b>	

The graph below presents a historical look at how visitation for the state park system has changed over the last ten years. Since then, overall state park visitation has grown by **51.5%**, or over **1** million visitors. By comparison, Yellowstone National Park saw a steady increase through 2021 with a slight decrease in 2022 due to flooding and road closures. Glacier National Park's visitation has increased by **34.5%** during the same period of time.



In 2022, there were **10** parks whose visitation exceeded 100,000, whereas in 2019 just **seven**. A full list of state parks and their visitation estimates for 2019-22 can be viewed on page four of this report.

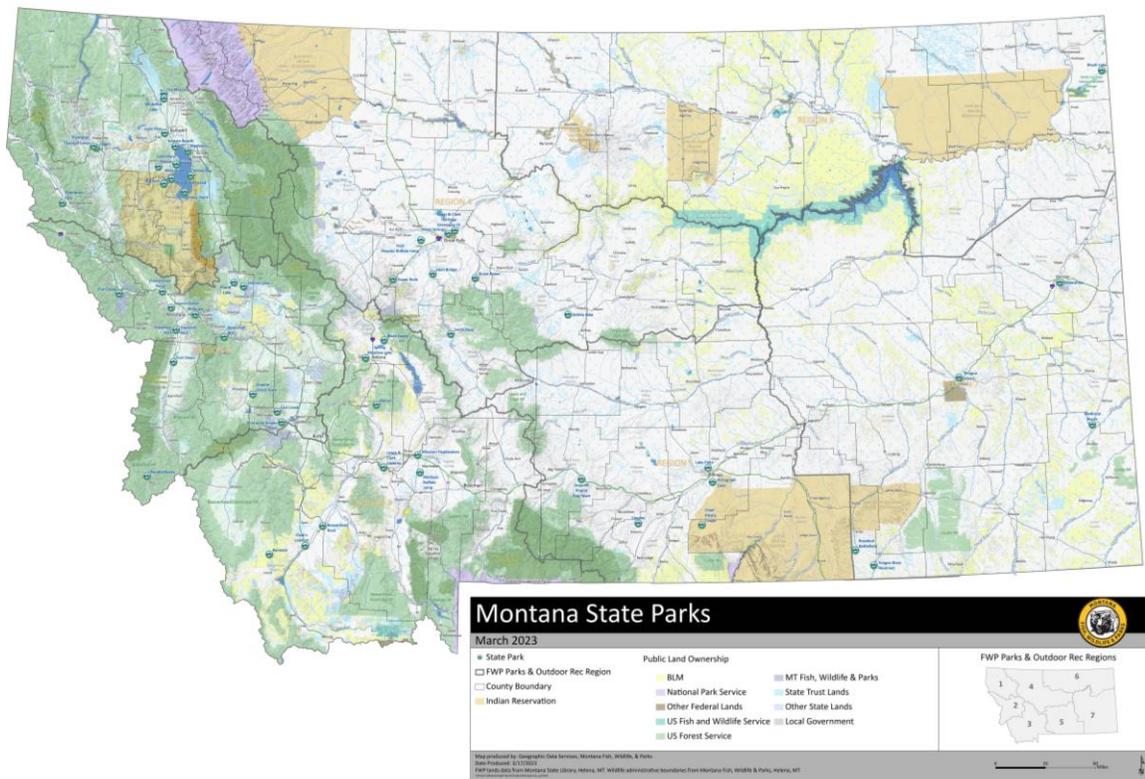
State Park Region	State Park (City/Town)	Total 2021 Visitation
4	Giant Springs (Great Falls)	465,367
1	Flathead Lake-all units (Kalispell)	311,875
5	Cooney Reservoir (Roberts)	209,960
4	Spring Meadow (Helena)	181,851
5	Lake Elmo (Billings)	165,530
1	Whitefish Lake (Whitefish)	151,072
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes (Libby)	131,622
1	Lone Pine (Kalispell)	122,494
7	Tongue River Reservoir (Decker)	107,978
7	Makoshika (Glendive)	103,999

## Introduction

This report has been developed utilizing 2019-2022 visitation estimates reported by state park managers. Visitation is a term used to describe the number of individuals visiting a state park. The system's visitation methodology did not substantially change during this time. However, reporting practices by staff members were updated, and there were small adjustments to visitation calculations, half-way through the year. Additionally, staff are continually examining ways to improve accuracy. Please see the reporting notes at the end of this summary for further clarification on such efforts, as well as some clarifying points on factors impacting visitation.<sup>i</sup>

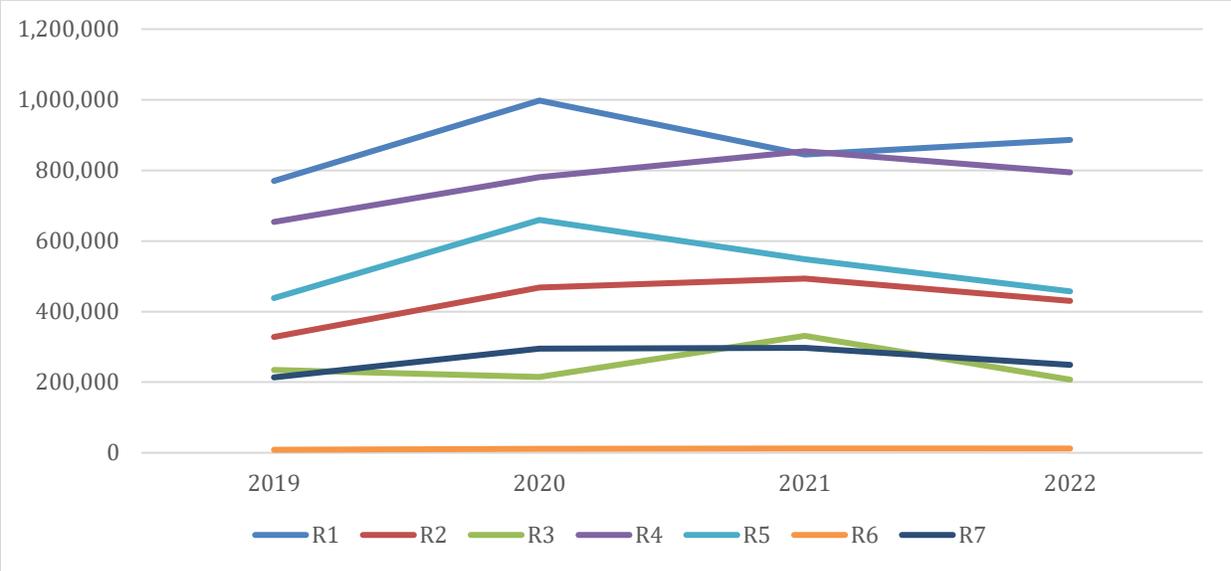
## A region-by-region glimpse

The Montana State Parks system is sub-divided into seven administrative regions with regional headquarter offices located in Kalispell (1), Missoula (2), Bozeman (3), Great Falls (4), Billings (5), Glasgow (6), and Miles City (7). An interesting way to look at visitation data is to see what has happened across each state park administrative region.



	2019	% Of 2019 total	2020	% Of 2020 total	2021	% Of 2021 total	2022	% Of 2022 total
<b>Region 1</b>	769,922	29.1%	997,581	29.1%	844,620	25.0%	886,272	29.1%
<b>Region 2</b>	328,092	12.4%	467,906	13.7%	493,474	14.6%	429,930	14.2%
<b>Region 3</b>	234,713	8.9%	215,287	6.3%	331,248	9.8%	207,283	6.8%
<b>Region 4</b>	653,939	24.7%	780,899	22.8%	853,998	25.3%	794,549	26.2%
<b>Region 5</b>	438,278	16.6%	659,559	19.2%	548,678	16.2%	457,315	15.1%
<b>Region 6</b>	8,556	0.3%	11,270	0.3%	12,181	0.4%	11,820	0.4%
<b>Region 7</b>	213,687	8.1%	295,004	8.6%	297,308	8.8%	248,952	8.2%
	<b>2,647,187</b>		<b>3,427,555</b>		<b>3,381,507</b>		<b>3,036,121</b>	

In 2022, Regions 1 and 4 cumulatively accounted for just over half of the state's overall visitation. Region 1 saw a slight uptick from 2021 after a year of decline, and Region 4 saw a small decline compared to the previous few years. Regions 2, 6, and 7 showed slight declines while Region 3 has alternated years of growth and decline. Region 5 grew after 2019 but then returned to its 2019 level in 2022.



### Total visitation (2019-22) and proportions of statewide totals

The chart below offers some further comparisons. Between 2019 and 2022 nearly all regions experienced double-digit growth with Region 2 notably growing by over **30%**; Region 1 by **11.2%**, Region 4 by **21.4%**, Region 5 by **4.3%**, Region 6 by **38.2%**, and Region 7 by over **16.5%**; and, Region 3 showing a decline of 11.7%. A look back at historical data for the system illustrates an increase in park use prior to the pandemic and continued growth through 2022. This data corroborates anecdotal evidence of the overall growth of outdoor recreation participation and use of public lands in Montana as well as recent surveys that have been undertaken from a number of industry perspectives.

Region	2022 comparison with 2019		2022 comparison with 2021	
	# Visits	% Change	# Visits	% Change
Region 1	+89,350	+11.2%	+41,652	+4.9%
Region 2	+101,838	+31.0%	-63,544	-12.9%
Region 3	-27,430	-11.7%	-123,965	-37.4%
Region 4	+140,610	+21.5%	-59,449	-7.0%
Region 5	+19,037	+4.34%	-91,333	-16.6%
Region 6	+3,264	+38.2%	-361	-2.96%
Region 7	+35,265	+16.5%	-48,356	-16.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>+361,934 est. visits (+13.5%)</b>		<b>-345,356 est. visits (-10.2%)</b>	

In comparing 2022 with the previous year, Region 3 saw the largest decline of all regions. During this same time period, declines in the other regions could be attributed to the market correction previously mentioned that is being seen across the outdoor recreation industry after the height of visitation and use from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these parks provide opportunities for camping and water-based recreation which could have been limited by such factors as wildfire smoke, drought conditions, and inclement weather.

### Statewide visitation estimates (2019-22)

Visitation at state parks increased for **17** state parks in 2022 compared with last year, and since 2019 it has increased at **30** state parks. Between 2019 and 2020 visitation increased for **36** state parks. In examining this time period, it is clear that many parks experienced explosive growth during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, even with the absence or sharp decline in school field trips and other group activities that could not take place. The table below provides annual estimates for all parks in order of descending 2022 visitation values.

RE- GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change (2019 and 2022)
4	Giant Springs	384,023	384,309	414,889	465,367	21.2%
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	354,826	471,709	339,631	311,875	-12.1%
5	Cooney Reservoir	175,870	359,607	263,691	208,960	18.8%
4	Spring Meadow	134,992	178,156	254,141	181,851	34.7%
5	Lake Elmo	182,022	231,388	212,916	165,530	-9.1%
1	Whitefish	72,573	86,398	105,648	151,072	108.2%
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	123,682	169,296	140,659	131,622	6.4%

RE- GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change (2019 and 2022)
1	Lone Pine	114,132	129,747	128,640	122,494	7.3%
7	Tongue River Reservoir	64,504	92,492	90,859	107,978	67.4%
7	Makoshika	85,272	128,288	150,484	103,999	22.0%
2	Milltown	36,387	72,433	110,732	89,170	145.1%
2	Travelers' Rest	39,851	49,545	64,933	75,048	88.3%
1	Les Mason	35,898	50,638	51,396	69,575	93.8%
2	Salmon Lake	50,754	72,709	86,987	59,098	16.4%
3	Missouri Headwaters	51,898	70,917	75,699	53,669	3.4%
3	Bannack	43,804	38,085	46,583	52,356	19.5%
2	Frenchtown Pond	51,272	83,670	59,240	51,479	0.4%
5	Pictograph Cave	54,273	42,870	44,569	50,160	-7.6%
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	86,077	40,591	145,637	50,015	-41.9%
4	Black Sandy	43,241	69,288	61,518	43,285	0.1%
1	Logan	30,050	35,928	30,355	41,894	39.4%
2	Placid Lake	67,695	90,179	57,752	39,989	-40.9%
2	Beavertail Hill	22,201	29,104	40,393	37,936	70.9%
2	Council Grove	35,868	46,757	43,249	33,765	-5.9%
1	Lake Mary Ronan	23,086	34,625	31,055	31,674	37.2%
4	Ackley Lake	32,522	66,480	45,715	29,712	-8.6%
4	Sluice Boxes	22,085	31,847	27,767	29,273	32.5%
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	16,202	15,376	19,286	28,352	75.0%
5	Chief Plenty Coups	15,907	13,017	13,352	22,681	42.6%
2	Fish Creek	6,281	N/A	N/A	20,792	231.0%
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	15,649	24,715	23,192	19,518	24.7%
1	Thompson Falls	15,675	19,240	17,236	18,129	15.7%
2	Painted Rocks	12,987	19,014	25,625	16,161	24.4%
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,309	16,787	15,796	13,833	-15.2%
7	Medicine Rocks	16,819	27,527	20,140	13,678	-18.7%
7	Rosebud Battlefield	6,563	5,973	5,460	13,605	107.3%
3	Lost Creek	15,346	18,633	16,992	12,883	-16.0%
4	Tower Rock	14,777	29,172	26,532	12,757	-13.7%
6	Brush Lake	8,556	11,270	12,181	11,820	38.1%
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	10,206	12,677	14,151	9,984	-2.2%
7	Pirogue Island	4,340	6,209	8,016	9,692	123.3%
1	Somers Beach	N/A	N/A	N/A	7,939	N/A
2	Fort Owen	4,796	4,495	4,563	6,491	35.3%
3	Clark's Lookout	5,630	5,559	3,750	4,120	-26.8%
4	Smith River	6,097	6,271	4,150	3,952	-35.2%
3	Beaverhead Rock	N/A	N/A	N/A	888	N/A
3	Granite Ghost Town	N/A	N/A	3,599	0	N/A
7	Hell Creek	36,189	34,515	22,349	N/A	N/A

## SPOTLIGHT: Why is visitation information important?

The COVID-19 health pandemic impacted 2020-2021 visitation across many public lands - in some cases it led to full or temporary closures of facilities, while for others, it led to explosive growth as the public sought a safe space to head outdoors.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has seen steady growth in park and other site visitation over the past decade and due to the lengthy seasons in which the agency's sites are open and used by visitors. Growth and evolution in the outdoor recreation industry has played a role in parlaying gear and equipment into the marketplace, and thereby converting year-round outdoor participation into a reality for many. This growth has important implications for the "outdoor recreation economy." Montana was second in the nation in 2021 for the percentage that outdoor recreation value added to the state's gross domestic product.<sup>1</sup>

Other considerations surrounding growth in visitation include how public land managers can more openly attract and engage individuals of diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds, both as visitors as well as part of the workforce and how to best protect and preserve natural, cultural and recreational resources for the long term. Education of 'new' park visitors has become a critical focus, echoed by the national "Recreate Responsibly" campaign. Meanwhile, infrastructural needs mount, as systems are put to the test, and staff retention and housing challenges are exacerbated.

Montana's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan<sup>2</sup> offers a framework for examining these issues, as does the application of measured studies and analytical reports that consider visitor use and important recreation management principles. Further evaluation and careful monitoring of visitation trends help to inform key decisions about planning, operations, and upholding stewardship principles.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

<sup>2</sup> [https://files.cfc.umt.edu/humandimensionslab/SCORP\\_2020-2024.pdf](https://files.cfc.umt.edu/humandimensionslab/SCORP_2020-2024.pdf)

## REGION 1

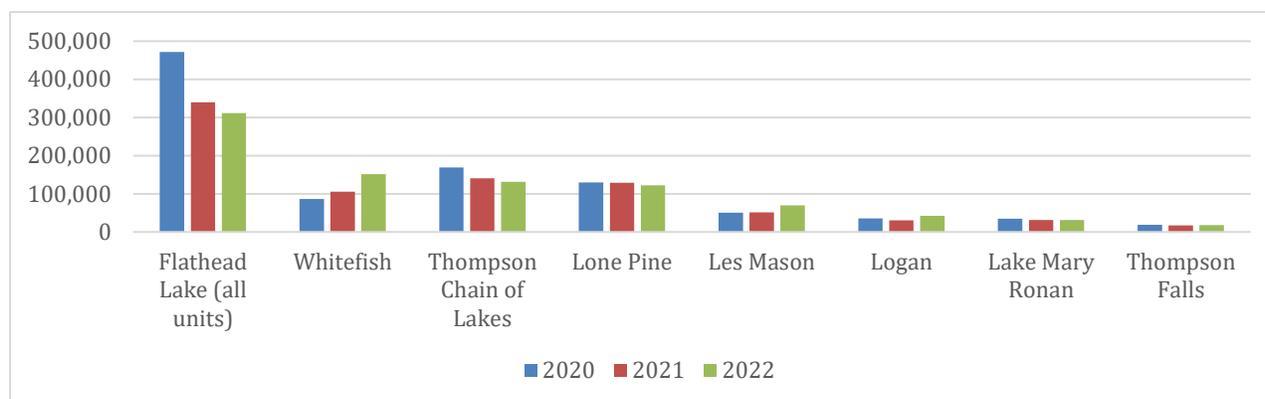
Region 1 served approximately **886,272** visitors in 2022. This represents an estimated **4.9%** increase compared with last year. While the pace of growth softened since 2020, the region's visitation was still **11.2%** higher than 2019. Visitation for Region 1 represents **29.2%** of the system's total visitation for 2022.

Significantly, of the ten parks in the state that saw visitation levels exceed 100,000, four are in Region 1 - Flathead Lake, Thompson Chain of Lakes, Lone Pine, and Whitefish. The important public access these parks provide is underscored by their continued visitation, especially as the Flathead Valley grows in population.

Interestingly, Flathead Lake, known for its beauty and access to camping and water recreation, welcomed fewer visitors across its six units since 2020, however it still was the second most visited state park this year. In several other cases across the region, state parks experienced much higher visitation than in 2021, but lower than in 2020's record setting year: Lake Mary Ronan and Thompson Falls. Also of note, Somers Beach State Park is now open with visitation being recorded and planning underway.

### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Region 1 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*

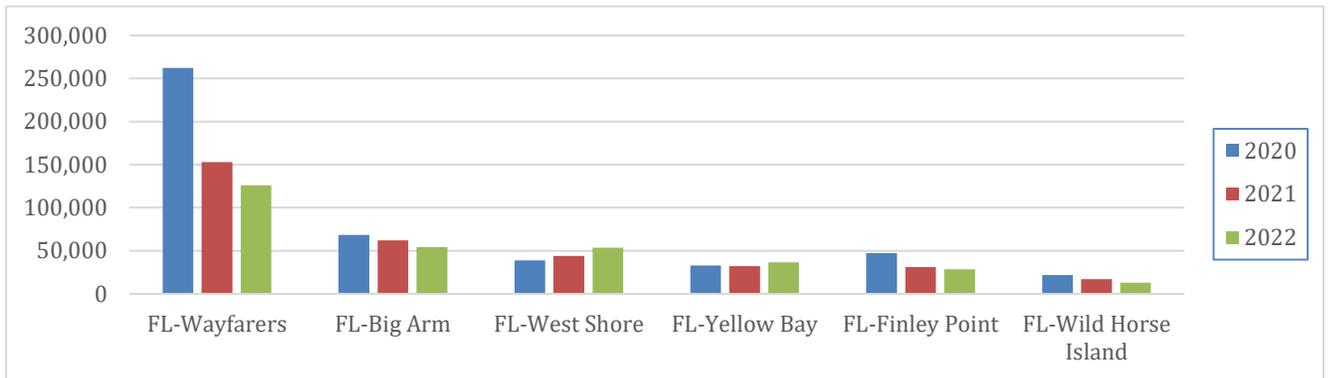


PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2021 and 2022	% Change between 2020 and 2022
Flathead Lake (all units)	471,709	339,631	311,875	-8.2%	-33.9%
Whitefish	86,398	105,648	151,071	+43.0%	+74.9%
Thompson Chain of Lakes	169,296	140,659	131,622	-6.4%	-22.3%
Lone Pine	129,747	128,640	122,494	-4.8%	-5.6%
Les Mason	50,638	51,396	69,575	+35.4%	+37.4%
Logan	35,928	30,355	41,894	+38.0%	+16.6%
Lake Mary Ronan	34,625	31,055	31,674	+2.0%	-8.5%
Thompson Falls	19,240	17,236	18,129	+5.2%	-5.8%
Somers Beach	n/a	n/a	7,939	n/a	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>997,581</b>	<b>844,620</b>	<b>886,273</b>	<b>+4.9%</b>	<b>-11.9%</b>

*NOTE: Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Lake Mary Ronan was evacuated for the first two weeks of August due to wildfire. Somers Beach counter installed August 2022.*

## Region 1 - Flathead Lake Unit estimates (2020-2022)

Sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation



FLATHEAD LAKE UNIT	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
FL-Wayfarers	262,402	153,155	125,861	-17.8%	-52.0%
FL-Big Arm	68,264	62,168	54,441	-12.4%	-20.3%
FL-West Shore	38,839	44,097	53,733	+21.9%	+38.3%
FL-Yellow Bay	32,811	32,251	36,488	+13.1%	+11.2%
FL-Finley Point	47,443	30,930	28,362	-8.3%	-40.2%
FL-Wild Horse Island	21,950	17,030	12,990	-23.7%	-40.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>471,709</b>	<b>339,631</b>	<b>311,875</b>	<b>-8.1%</b>	<b>-33.9%</b>

*NOTE: The entrance gate is seasonally closed during much of the winter at the Finley Point unit of Flathead. Additionally, Wild Horse Island counters are not accessed in the winter and data will be updated in spring.*

## REGION 2

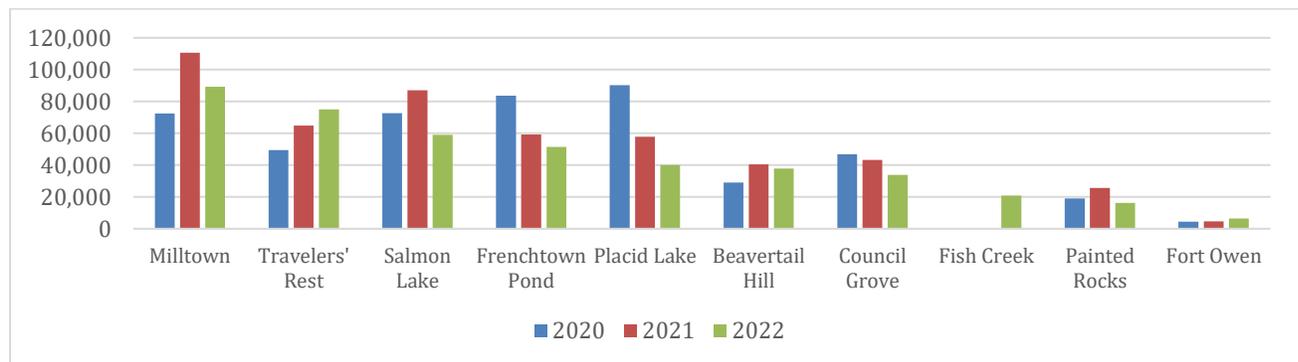
With an estimated **429,929** visitors in 2022, Region 2 experienced a **12.9%** decrease from 2021 and only an **8%** decrease from 2020. Visitation in Region 2 represents **14.2%** of the system's total visitation for 2022.

A key driver of the region's visitation has been attributable to Milltown, which exceeded 100,000 visitors for the first time in 2021. Some of the growth can be attributed to the use of additional trail counting devices, but the increase is unsurprising overall given a surge in awareness of the park, particularly for local residents. Continued activities and organized events including a collaborative shuttle effort between park staff and local groups for the Clark Fork River adds to visitation.

Fish Creek now has two counters installed to capture increasing visitation. Additionally, Fish Creek is undergoing a process to develop a management direction document to address increased use. Despite the decline in visitation in this region for 2022, all but one park (Placid Lake) are still showing visitation levels higher than 2019 numbers.

### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Region 2 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2021 and 2022	% Change between 2020 and 2022
Milltown	72,433	110,732	89,170	-19.5%	+23.1%
Travelers' Rest	49,545	64,933	75,048	+15.6%	+51.5%
Salmon Lake	72,709	86,987	59,098	-32.1%	-18.7%
Frenchtown Pond	83,670	59,240	51,479	-13.1%	-38.5%
Placid Lake	90,179	57,752	39,989	-30.8%	-55.7%
Beavertail Hill	29,104	40,393	37,936	-6.1%	+30.3%
Council Grove	46,757	43,249	33,765	-21.9%	-27.8%
Fish Creek	0	0	20,792	N/A	N/A
Painted Rocks	19,014	25,625	16,161	-37.0%	-15.0%
Fort Owen	4,495	4,563	4,563	+42.3%	+44.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>467,906</b>	<b>493,474</b>	<b>429,929</b>	<b>-12.9%</b>	<b>-8.1%</b>

*NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek was not regularly reported in 2020 or 2021, however staff began to collect data there in 2022 with an additional counter installed in July.*

### REGION 3

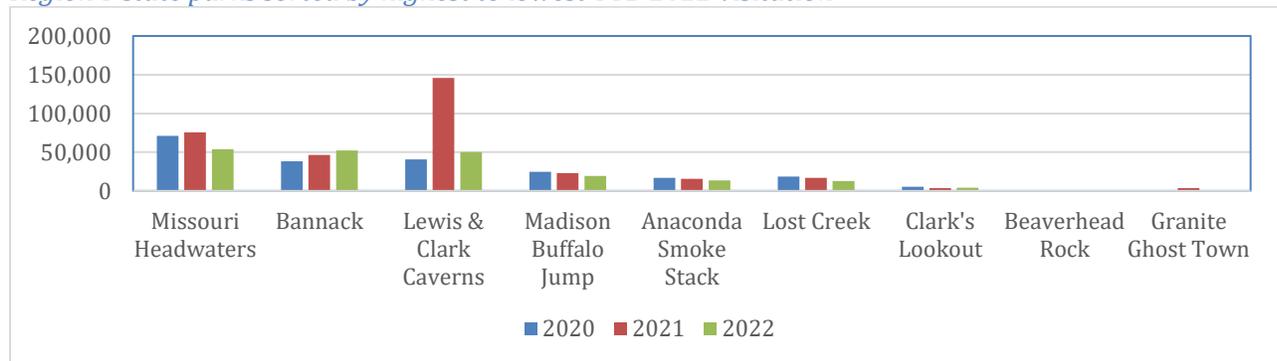
With an estimated **207,283** visitors in 2022, Region 3 experienced a **37.4%** decrease since 2021; however, just a small decrease since 2019 (down by just under 30,000 visits). Region 3's 2022 visitation represents **6.8%** of the system's total visitation. It should be noted that some of the decline in visitation could be contributed to inactive counters in the region as well as a few instances of missing data due to counter error. Additionally, this region experienced the historic Yellowstone Flood in June 2022. This area was declared a disaster, and national media coverage of the event resulted in travel plan changes from both residents and visitors alike.

Some increase at Lewis & Clark Caverns from 2020 can be attributed to cave tours not occurring during 2020. However, the decline from 2021 numbers is significant.

Bannack is another park that has seen steady growth. Meanwhile, declines at Missouri Headwaters and Madison Buffalo Jump might partially be attributed to missing counter data during typically busy months of July and August. Beaverhead Rock recording started during 2022; however, this counter is inaccessible during winter months. Data will be adjusted once retrieved in the spring.

#### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Region 3 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2021 and 2022	% Change between 2020 and 2022
Missouri Headwaters	70,917	75,699	53,669	-29.1%	-24.3%
Bannack	38,085	46,583	52,356	+12.4%	+37.5%
Lewis & Clark Caverns	40,591	145,637	50,015	-65.7%	+23.2%
Madison Buffalo Jump	24,715	23,192	19,518	-15.8%	-21.0%
Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,787	15,796	13,833	-12.4%	-17.6%
Lost Creek	18,633	16,992	12,883	-24.2%	-30.9%
Clark's Lookout	5,559	3,750	4,120	+9.9%	-25.9%
Beaverhead Rock	0	0	888	N/A	N/A
Granite Ghost Town	0	3,599	0	N/A	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>215,287</b>	<b>331,248</b>	<b>207,283</b>	<b>-37.4%</b>	<b>-3.7%</b>

*NOTE: Visitation data began being regularly collected at Beaverhead Rock in June 2022. The counter at Granite Ghost Town was not operational for all of 2022, and Anaconda Smoke Stack is inactive.*

## REGION 4

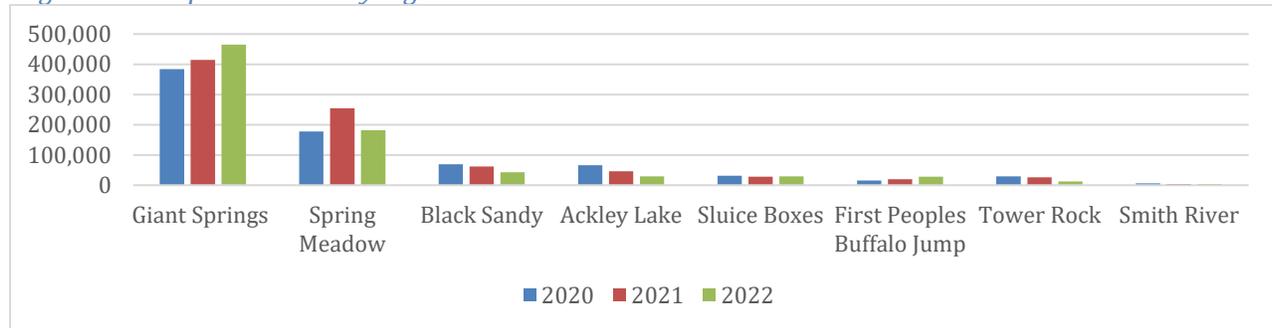
With an estimated **794,549** visitors in 2022, Region 4 experienced a small decline of **-6.9%** from 2021 but an increase over an already record breaking year in 2020 (**1.7%** more in 2022). Region 4's 2022 visitation represents **26.2%** of the system's total visitation.

The region's overall visitation is largely driven by Giant Springs, which was Montana's most visited state park again for 2022. It attracts numerous visitors and is a true destination for the city of Great Falls. Spring Meadow Lake is on a similar growth trajectory, and in 2021 was the fourth most visited state park. Some of the growth is attributable to additional trail counting devices, but the park continues to host events, educational activities in conjunction with MT Wild, and offers the Helena community a wonderful space for recreating outdoors. First People's Buffalo Jump also saw gains in visitation.

Black Sandy showed a decrease from 2021; however, it is still showing an increase over 2019 numbers. Ackley Lake experienced blue green algae in August which could have impacted visitor numbers, and Giant Springs had road construction during the same time that likely reduced visitation (though overall the park is still seeing an increase for the year).

### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Region 4 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2021 and 2022	% Change between 2020 and 2022
<b>Giant Springs</b>	384,309	414,889	465,367	+12.2%	+21.1%
<b>Spring Meadow</b>	178,156	254,141	181,851	-28.4%	+2.1%
<b>Black Sandy</b>	69,288	61,518	43,285	-29.6%	-37.5%
<b>Ackley Lake</b>	66,480	45,715	29,712	-35.0%	-55.3%
<b>Sluice Boxes</b>	31,847	27,767	29,273	+5.4%	-8.1%
<b>First Peoples Buffalo Jump</b>	15,376	19,286	28,352	+47.0%	+84.4%
<b>Tower Rock</b>	29,172	26,532	12,757	-51.9%	-56.2%
<b>Smith River</b>	6,271	4,150	3,952	-4.8%	-37.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>780,899</b>	<b>853,998</b>	<b>794,549</b>	<b>-6.9%</b>	<b>+1.8%</b>

*NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn. Visitation data for the Smith River is captured using float logs and is not recorded during the winter months. During 2022, there are a few instances of counter error/missing data at Spring Meadow Lake. Due to vandalism and counter malfunction, Giant Springs numbers in the fall were impacted.*

## REGION 5

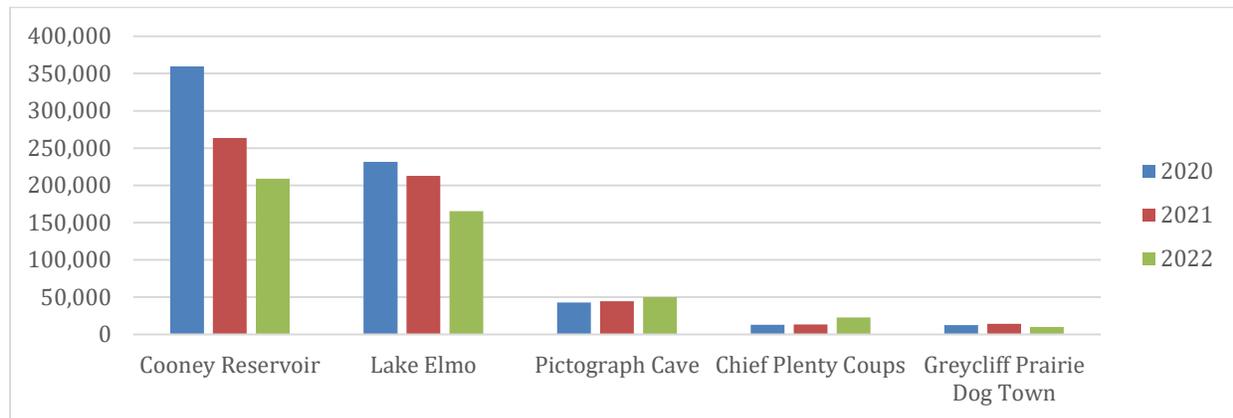
With an estimated **457,315** visitors in 2022, Region 5 experienced a **30.7%** decrease below its 2021 visitation, yet was an estimated **4.3%** higher than in 2020 and still above 2019 levels (by roughly 20,000 visits). Region 5's 2022 visitation represents **15.1%** of the system's total visitation. As mentioned when looking at Region 3 data, Region 5 also likely saw impacts from the Yellowstone flooding event. Carbon County was part of the declared disaster area, which happened during the height of the summer visitation season.

There are two parks that largely drive the region's overall visitation - Cooney Reservoir and Lake Elmo. They were the third and fifth most visited state parks in the system, respectively. Both of these parks saw a decline from both 2020 and 2021; however, Cooney still shows an almost 19% increase over 2019 numbers. Both experience frequent use by residents of the growing Billings community.

Also close to Billings is Pictograph Cave, a park that experienced an increase in visitation the last three years. Chief Plenty Coups, located on the Crow Reservation, experienced a similar pattern in its visitation, once again drawing in many local residents and others.

### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Region 5 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2021 and 2022	% Change between 2020 and 2022
<b>Cooney Reservoir</b>	359,607	263,691	208,960	-20.8%	-41.9%
<b>Lake Elmo</b>	231,388	212,916	165,530	-22.3%	-28.5%
<b>Pictograph Cave</b>	42,870	44,569	50,160	+12.5%	+17.0%
<b>Chief Plenty Coups</b>	13,017	13,352	22,681	+69.9%	+74.2%
<b>Greycliff Prairie Dog Town</b>	12,677	14,151	9,984	-29.5%	-21.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>659,559</b>	<b>548,678</b>	<b>457,315</b>	<b>-16.7%</b>	<b>-30.7%</b>

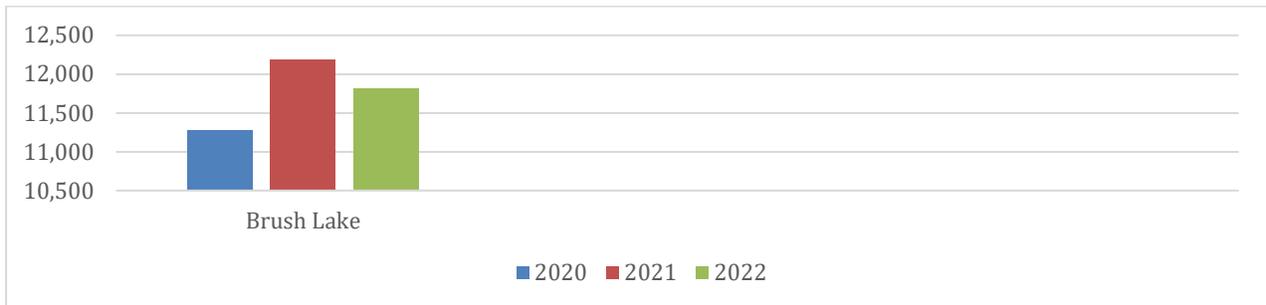
*NOTE: Counter numbers were unavailable for Grey Cliff Prairie Dog Town for at least one month. Lake Elmo Trail counter data is missing for multiple months. Cooney Reservoir has missing data for different counters spanning a few months in the second half of the year. Additionally, single digit temperatures during November and December could have impacted late season visits.*

## REGION 6

For many years, Regions 6 and 7 were combined into one administrative region. Starting in 2022, they have been broken back out into two with only Brush Lake State Park in Region 6. With an estimated **11,820** visitors, Region 6 experienced a **3%** decline from 2021, which saw a slight increase over its 2020; however 2022 is an increase of **4.9%** over 2020. Region 6 visitation represents less than **0.5%** of the system's total visitation for 2022.

### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Region 6 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2022 and 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2022
<b>Brush Lake</b>	11,270	12,181	11,820	-3.0%	+4.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,270</b>	<b>12,181</b>	<b>11,820</b>	<b>-3.0%</b>	<b>+4.9%</b>

*NOTE: Brush Lake is seasonally closed in the winter months.*

## REGION 7

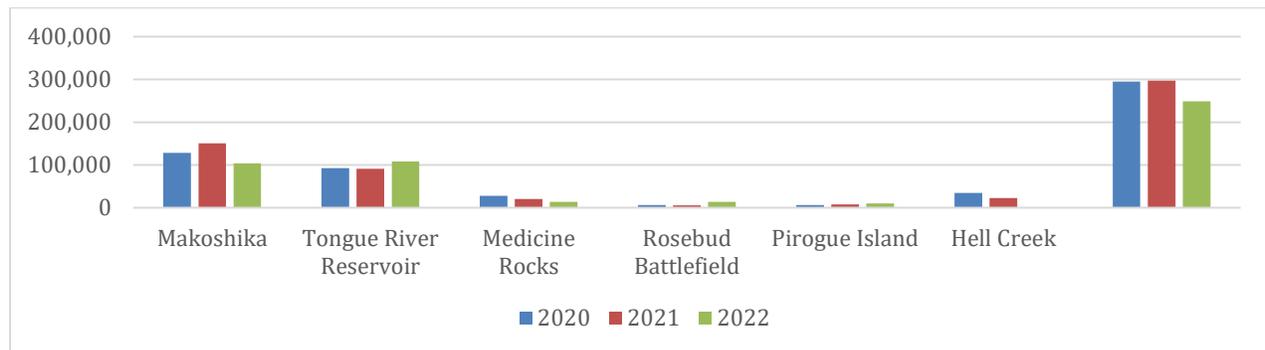
With an estimated **248,952** visitors, Region 7 experienced a **16.3%** decline from 2021, which saw a slight increase over its 2020 visitation and was an estimated **16.5%** higher than in 2019. Region 7 visitation represents **8.2%** of the system's total visitation for 2022.

Two parks - Makoshika and Tongue River Reservoir - largely drive the region's overall visitation. In 2022, they were both in the top 10 most visited parks in the system with Tongue River visitation surpassing Makoshika for the first time. Medicine Rocks has experienced year over year declines since the pandemic. Whereas Rosebud Battlefield and Pirogue Island have seen increases, on average, since 2019.

In March of 2022, Hell Creek was transferred to management by the Little Shell Tribe of the Chippewa Indians of Montana and therefore is no longer included in visitation estimates for the state parks system.

### Estimated 2020-2022 visitation

*Regions 6 and 7 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2022 visitation*



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	% Change between 2022 and 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2022
<b>Makoshika</b>	128,288	150,484	103,999	-31.0%	-18.9%
<b>Tongue River Reservoir</b>	92,492	90,859	107,978	+18.8%	+16.7%
<b>Medicine Rocks</b>	27,527	20,140	13,678	-32.1%	-50.3
<b>Rosebud Battlefield</b>	5,973	5,460	13,605	+149.2%	+127.8%
<b>Pirogue Island</b>	6,209	8,016	9,692	+20.9%	+56.1%
<b>Hell Creek</b>	34,515	22,349	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295,004</b>	<b>297,308</b>	<b>248,952</b>	<b>-16.3%</b>	<b>-15.6%</b>

*NOTE: Hell Creek is no longer part of the Montana State Parks system. Medicine Rocks likely had lower visitation late in the year due to the road becoming inaccessible from heavy snow. Tongue River increased the number of traffic counters from 2021, which could have contributed to increased visitation numbers.*

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**<sup>i</sup> Reporting notes:**

*Visitation data is based on reported estimates from 47 of Montana's 55 state parks. In the winter, some parks and/or campground entrances are seasonally closed. While the system does experience some off-season camping, numbers have traditionally been low. Typically, most campgrounds do not open until May 1 with reservations beginning six months ahead of arrival dates.*

*FWP is working with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising parks' visitation methodology. The reporting of Montana State Parks visitation data is partially supported by ITRR's budget through the lodging facility use tax for recreation monitoring statewide. Additionally, FWP added counting devices to entrances where either (a) existing counters were nearing the end of their useful life, or (b) there simply were none installed. Prior to 2020, visitation data only included estimates for visitors arriving by vehicle. Since then, walk-in/bike-in visitors have been counted leading to some degree of growth in estimates.*

*It should also be noted that FWP occasionally evaluates its methodological approaches and in turn may determine the need to make slight revisions to a previous month's total to improve accuracy. Additionally, some counters are inaccessible in winter months and data will not be retrieved until spring. At that time, numbers will be revised. Multipliers such as persons per vehicle and administrative traffic are based off of annual observations made during the 2020 and 2021 years. These calculations will be updated on a rotating basis throughout the state parks system- ideally a minimum of five parks per year.*

*For questions about this report, please contact administrative staff with the Parks and Outdoor Recreation division of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks at their headquarters: 406-444-3750.*